



Health Ministers Meeting (HMM)

Communique:

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Roundtable

7 October 2022 at Adelaide

Health Ministers joined Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community leaders, peak organisations, and other stakeholders on Kaurna country to gain an intimate and first-hand account of the how the health system works from the perspective of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, including the continuing inequities.

It has been four years since the inaugural Health Roundtable in Alice Springs in 2018.

Local Traditional Owners welcomed attendees of the Roundtable to Kaurna country. They acknowledged Elders past, present and emerging, and gave a particular welcome to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people amongst the attendees.

The Hon. Yvette D'Ath (Queensland Minister for Health and Ambulance Services and Chair HMM) and the Hon. Chris Picton (South Australian Minister for Health and Wellbeing) warmly welcomed participants to this significant event, creating a safe environment where participants felt comfortable to speak openly, engage in truth telling and share their lived experience about accessing healthcare in Australia. Minister D'Ath emphasised the importance of Health Ministers taking the opportunity to actively listen, understand and explore how to partner with First Nations peoples, working in partnership to address inequities, grow First Nations workforce and provide a health system that is culturally appropriate, safe, and free from trauma.

Health Ministers reflected on the excellent work and collaboration between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Controlled Health Organisations and health services, States and Territories and the Australian Government, during the COVID-19 pandemic response to improve COVID-19 health outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and provide a strong foundation for future collaboration.

The following key topics were discussed - cultural determinants of health including cultural safety and governance, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce and data sovereignty. While these topics are inexorably linked, each uniquely contributes to achieving health equity for First Nations peoples.

Health Ministers heard about the importance of providing healthcare that incorporates cultural determinants of health - the protective factors that enable resilience, strengthen identity, and support good health and wellbeing. While progress continues to be made with the Closing the

Gap agenda, the Health Roundtable reinforced the importance of action, putting a face to the data and a story to the gaps.

Health Ministers were told of the critical importance of addressing racism in the health system and bringing the First Nations voice to the fore. This will help embed an understanding of the cultural determinants of health and enable this workforce to be valued as cultural brokers to effect substantive change from within. It provides an opportunity to co-design health services that directly meet the needs of First Nations peoples as identified by First Nations peoples, as well as valuing the role of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Workers/Health Practitioners.

Health Ministers also heard how important comparable qualitative and quantitative data is in enabling First Nations peoples to tell the whole story to inform an evidence-based approach to achieve health equity.

On hearing the experience of First Nations peoples, Health Ministers unanimously committed to work in partnership and to explore ways to bring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices more actively into decision making. Health Ministers agreed to extend the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Collaboration beyond 30 June 2023 and to hold Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Roundtables every two years. These Health Roundtables will provide an opportunity to review progress to date and outline steps for the future.

A report capturing the proposed actions from the Health Roundtable will be drafted in co-design with event participants for consideration by Health Ministers. This report will include up to three programmatic, practical initiatives that deliver sustained and meaningful impact on the health outcomes for First Nations peoples. The report will propose that the progress against these initiatives should provide the benchmark for measuring progress at the next Health Roundtable in 2024.